

Abstract of the Invention

An instant messaging system provides instant message communication between computers, including multi-user computers. The system provides multiple concurrent instant message user logins on a multi-user computer, one of the multiple concurrent instant message user logins being a registered buddy of a user of a second computer. The second computer is provided an indication that the registered buddy is one of multiple concurrent instant message user logins on a multi-user computer. As a result, the user of the second computer is notified of the lack of privacy at the multi-user computer and can send a message with a topic and language that are appropriate to be viewed by multiple users. A video display, such as a movie or television programming like a sporting event, may be rendered on the multi-user computer concurrently with the multiple concurrent instant message user logins on the multi-user computer. Instant messages are rendered over a portion of the video display in a manner that is unobtrusive to the multiple users. As a result, the instant messaging of the present invention can operate smoothly with multi-user computers, protecting the private nature of conventional instant messaging while minimizing the disruptiveness of instant messaging to accommodate shared use of a multi-user computer.